

Terrestrial Conservation Focus Areas in Greatest Need (Tier I)

Bitterroot/Frenchtown Valleys (406,859 acres)



Figure 3. Bitterroot/Frenchtown Valleys Focus Area

The Bitterroot/Frenchtown Valleys area is dominated by views of the jagged peaks of the Bitterroot Range to the west and the lower Sapphire Mountains to the east. The Bitterroot River bisects the valley floor from Idaho north to Missoula. The valleys are arid, flat, or gently rolling landscapes 2 to 15 miles wide. While the valleys support many habitats—from grassland and riparian to forest and sagebrush—most of the area is now in agricultural production. The rolling mountain foothills at the valley edges are important elk, white-tailed deer, and mule deer winter range. In the valley bottoms, the cottonwood riparian habitats are some of the most productive wildlife habitats in the state and are home to a wide variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

Landscape Characteristics

This subsection contains intermountain valleys that formed in alluvium, outwash, and lacustrine sediments. Elevations range from 3,000 to 4,400 feet. Drainage density is slight. Wetlands occur along both the Clark Fork and Bitterroot rivers. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 11 to 25 inches, with about 40 to 60 percent falling as snow. The soil temperature and moisture regimes are frigid and typically ustic. Primary natural disturbances are flooding and fire, as seen by the dramatic effects of the forest fires in the area in 2000. Another important natural biotic disturbance is beaver activity in riparian and wetland areas. Land use is predominantly extensive urban/suburban development and agricultural activities.

The breakdown for land stewardship in the Bitterroot/Frenchtown Valleys area is as follows:

U.S. Federal Agencies: 42,935 acres, or 10.6% of total area, which include:
 USFS: 40,155 acres, or 9.9% of total area
 USFWS: 2,780 acres, or 0.7% of total area
 State Agencies: 14,147 acres, or 3.5% of total area
 Private: 348,727 acres, or 85.7% of total area

Associated Habitats

Habitat	Habitat Tier	Percentage of Area
Mixed Xeric Forest	III	3.57
Wetland and Riparian	I	3.72
Urban	III	3.73
Douglas Fir	II	4.48
Sagebrush	I	4.57
Agricultural Lands - Dry	III	5.73
Mixed Mesic Forest	II	6.05
Ponderosa Pine	II	6.65
Mixed Mesic Shrubs	II	8.52
Altered Herbaceous	II	10.17
Agricultural Lands - Irrigated	III	11.19
Low/Moderate Cover Grasslands	I	25.11

Note: A total of 93.5% of the Bitterroot/Frenchtown Valleys area is represented; 6.5% is made up of a combination of other habitat types.

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 340 terrestrial vertebrate species that are found within the Bitterroot/Frenchtown Valleys Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 9.

Amphibians: Coeur d' Alene Salamander, Western Toad, and Northern Leopard Frog

Birds: Common Loon, Trumpeter Swan, Harlequin Duck, Bald Eagle, Long-billed Curlew, Black Tern, Flammulated Owl, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Olive-sided Flycatcher

Mammals: Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Northern Bog Lemming, Gray Wolf, and Grizzly Bear

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, especially as a result of human population growth and development of transportation infrastructure	Support strategic conservation easements by conservation organizations and public agencies
	Identify and prioritize key wildlife linkage areas, and work with other state and federal agencies, conservation groups, and landowners to restore wildlife connectivity
	Support state/federal tax incentives that discourage habitat fragmentation
	Promote further development of county ordinances that help guide future residential and commercial development
Invasive and exotic plant and animal species	Participate in partnerships to develop and implement weed control strategies as well as invasive species management
Range and forest management practices	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices (example; rest and rotation schedules)
Streamside residential development	Develop statewide riparian best management principles